

# Collection localities of the Night Parrot *Pezoporus (Geopsittacus) occidentalis* (Gould, 1861)

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Received 18 May 2012

**SUMMARY.**—The vanishingly rare Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* of the extensive arid regions of continental Australia is represented by 25 extant specimens in the world's museums, of 28 known to have been collected. Apart from one collected before the holotype, the holotype itself, two initially acquired alive and the most recent two, found desiccated, all were collected during the decade 1871–81 by Frederick William Andrews. He took almost all of his specimens in the Gawler Ranges, western South Australia, but one (and possibly more) came from Cooper Creek in north-eastern South Australia. He alone is known to have actively searched for Night Parrots and seen the species alive; most, if not all, subsequent encounters have occurred by chance.

Forshaw *et al.* (1976) documented then known museum specimens of the Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* (numbered 1–22 in Table 1) and drew attention to the significance of F. W. Andrews as a collector of up to 16 of them, from the Gawler Ranges and Lake Eyre regions of South Australia (SA). Two other specimens were prepared following the demise of birds acquired alive by the Zoological Society of London. The first came from Nonning Station, Gawler Ranges, in 1867; captured by the pastoralist Charles Ryan it was forwarded via the distinguished colonial botanist Dr Ferdinand Mueller (Table 1: 15). The other was acquired in 1873 from an unnamed source via a London dealer (Table 1: 13) (Sclater 1867, 1873, Murie 1868). Among others discussed by Forshaw *et al.* (1976) a specimen from north-eastern SA (Table 1: 16), in fact the earliest collected, had been misidentified as the closely related Eastern Ground Parrot *P. wallicus*, avoided John Gould's attention and was long overlooked. The remaining three specimens, including the holotype, were considered to have come from Western Australia (WA). Forshaw *et al.* (1976) referred to the Night Parrot as a 'vanished species', only one specimen having then been collected in the 20th century (Table 1: 23), near a tributary of the Ashburton River (WA) by Martin Augustus Bourgoïn, but it was poorly prepared and was not retained (Wilson 1937). While there have been no confirmed sightings of live birds since those of Bourgoïn and others named by Wilson (1937) two carcasses have been found in western Queensland (Table 1: 24–25) (Boles *et al.* 1994, Cupitt & Cupitt 2008, McDougall *et al.* 2009). The archives of the South Australian Museum, Adelaide (SAMA), contain information (unavailable to Forshaw *et al.* 1976) concerning the exchange of Night Parrot specimens and at least one other (in Stuttgart) was overlooked by them (R. Prŷs-Jones pers. comm.; Sclater 1894). My aim here is to clarify and extend the documentation of museum specimens and their localities provided by Forshaw *et al.* (1976).

## Methods

I examined the archives at SAMA for any reference to the acquisition or exchange of Night Parrot specimens and enquired via the European Curators' Bulletin Board for any specimens in museum collections that were not listed by Forshaw *et al.* (1976).

TABLE 1

Currently known Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* specimens; those that Forshaw *et al.* (1976) concluded were probably taken by F. W. Andrews are indicated \*.

Museum and registration details	Locality	Date and comments
<b>Australian Museum, Sydney</b>		
1 AM 0.17831		
2 AM 0.17832	Gawler Ranges, SA *	12 November 1872 [presumed collection date]
3 AM 8393	'Central SA' *	A mount, registered between 1869 and 1875
4 AM A.9308		
5 AM A.9309	Gawler Ranges, SA *	Registered 1880
AM A.9310	Gawler Ranges, SA	Registered 1880; not found in museum (see below)
<b>Macleay Museum, Sydney</b>		
6 B 1618	South Australia *	Sent from SAMA, June 1874
<b>Museum Victoria, Melbourne</b>		
7 NMV B36256	Lake Eyre, SA *	Donated by J. Leadbeater, July 1876
8 NMV HLW 54		
9 NMV HLW 55	Gawler Ranges, SA *	From the Robert Grant (private) collection
<b>South Australian Museum, Adelaide</b>		
10 SAMA B8118	Gawler Ranges, SA *	F. W. Andrews undated
11 SAMA B24172	Gawler Ranges SA *	F. W. Andrews '1880' [A9310 above, returned from Australian Museum, Sydney, 20 June 1951]
<b>Natural History Museum, Tring</b>		
12 BMNH 1868.1.37.30	Mount Farmer, WA	Holotype, collected by C. Farmer, 23 September 1854
13 BMNH 1939.12.9.554	Unknown	Acquired alive by London Zoo, 16 March 1873
14 BMNH 1881.11.7.1117	'Western Australia'	Part of J. T. Cockerell collection
15 BMNH 1868.4.15.3	Gawler Ranges, SA	Received by London Zoo, November 1867. Sternum and shoulder bones; mount subsequently registered as BM 1990.7.1
<b>National Museums Liverpool</b>		
16 LIVM D.640c	North of Cooper Creek, SA	J. McDouall Stuart, 15 October 1845
<b>Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris</b>		
17 MNHN CG 1879, 679.		
18 MNHN CG 1879, 680	Unknown *	Received from SAMA, 1879
<b>American Museum of Natural History, New York</b>		
19 AMNH 623832	'Western Australia'	Formerly BM 1881.11.7.1118, Cockerell collection
20 AMNH 623833	South Australia *	'About 1890?' 'collected by Andrews between Lake Acraman and Lake Gairdner'; type of <i>Geopsittacus occidentalis whiteae</i> Mathews, 1915
<b>National Museum of Natural History, Washington</b>		
21 USNM 71792	South Australia *	Exhibited at Philadelphia Exhibition 1876
<b>Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, MA</b>		
22 MCZ 31516	South Australia *	Bought by R. A. Ward, dealer, in 1880 or earlier

**Additional specimens**

23	Never accessioned	Nichol Spring, WA	Collected by M. A. Burgoin, 21 September 1912, near Ashburton River, now lost
24	Queensland Museum QM O 29055	North of Boulia, west Queensland	17 October 1990 (Boles <i>et al.</i> 1994)
25	Queensland Museum QM O 32613	Diamantina National Park, west Queensland	17 September 2006 (Cupitt & Cupitt 2008)
26	Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde, Stuttgart, specimen	Gawler Ranges?	Probably acquired in 1883 (see text)
27	Strasbourg MZS 14583	Gawler Ranges, SA	Acquired late 19th century (see text)
28	Hungarian Natural History Museum, Budapest, specimen or specimens	Unknown	Purchased by G. A. Frank from a London trader in 1882

**Results**

SAMA records reveal that collections of birds and mammal from the Gawler Ranges were acquired from Andrews on up to eight occasions in 1870–83. He sold his first Night Parrot specimen to the museum in December 1871. Other documented acquisitions were two in March 1873, six in October 1873 and four in November 1873. The last ten were listed for possible exchange with the Calcutta museum, but I cannot confirm that any were used for such a purpose. Night Parrots are not listed with Gawler Ranges collections from Andrews in 1878, 1880 and 1881, but it is probable that he was successful on at least some trips in that period because, during September–December 1883, he made several references (in extant letters) to his continued anticipation of obtaining the species; however, it is evident that his expectation was unfulfilled in that year.

Andrews supplied SAMA with a single Night Parrot specimen from Cooper Creek during his engagement as naturalist with the 1874–75 survey of Lake Eyre (SA) and this was exchanged with John Leadbeater of Melbourne in January 1876 (now in Museum Victoria, Table 1: 7) as reported by Forshaw *et al.* (1976). There are records of only four specimens



Figure 1. Strasbourg Night Parrot *Pezoporos occidentalis* specimen (MZS 14583), for which the English-language label reads: 'Sp 442 Gould. *Geopsittacus occidentalis*. Gawler Ranges S. Aust.' (© M. Meister)

being exchanged with other collections; one went to the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, in June 1874 (Table 1: 6), one to Leadbeater (above) and two from the Gawler Ranges were forwarded to J. T. Cockerell of Brisbane in September 1873. Forshaw *et al.* (1976) found that a registered specimen, listed in the Australian Museum, Sydney (AM A.9310) was missing but noted a second specimen in SAMA that was unreported by Sutton (*in Wilson 1937*). The AM skin had been transferred to SAMA in 1951 (Table 1: 11).

Responses from the European Curators' Bulletin Board enquiry revealed the existence or former existence of at least three Night Parrot specimens additional to those reported by Forshaw *et al.* (1976).

Confirming Sclater's (1894) reference to one or more specimens in Stuttgart, the museum's catalogue lists one Night Parrot specimen acquired with a grasswren (*Amytornis*) specimen from the Gawler Ranges (Black unpubl.). However, it is now missing, presumed stolen with other parrot specimens (F. Woog *in litt.* 2012). Documentation of the grasswren skin indicated its collection in South Australia and purchase in 1883 from Gustav Schneider, trader and former museum curator in Basel (K. Schwarz pers. comm.). SAMA records show that its Director Wilhelm Haacke forwarded 1,000 zoological specimens to Schneider in 1882–84 in exchange for specimens from Africa and South America (Hale 1956).

In the Museum of Zoology, Strasbourg, is a well-preserved Night Parrot skin (MZS 14583; Table 1: 23; Fig. 1) whose origin is the Gawler Ranges, SA; the specimen is undated, but its Strasbourg label is typical of those used in the second half of the 19th century (M. Meister *in litt.* 2012).

Records in the Hungarian Natural History Museum, Budapest, show that one or two Night Parrot specimens were purchased by G. A. Frank from a London-based trader in 1882. However, this collection was destroyed by fire caused by Russian artillery in 1956 (T. Fuisz *in litt.* 2012).

In the Department of Zoology, Cambridge University, there is a partial pectoral girdle and sternum of a Night Parrot (among Newton's sterna collection; UMZC 1007.a, 28.11.1901: M. Brooke pers. comm.). Such skeletal remnants could be from a specimen already accounted for and are therefore not included in the Table.

## Discussion

Frederick William Andrews was a self-employed naturalist who collected (chiefly) vertebrate specimens for SAMA between 1864 and 1884. He is recognised, in addition to his unparalleled success with the Night Parrot, as the collector of the syntypes of Eyrean Grasswren *Amytornis goyderi* (Gould, 1875).

In their review of Night Parrot specimens Forshaw *et al.* (1976) identified 23, including one that was subsequently lost; they emphasised Andrews' success in collecting 16 of the total. I find that, in addition to two specimens obtained more recently, at least three others entered European collections during the 19th century; I can also clarify some uncertainties presented in the earlier review. Of the 19 identified as taken in SA, Forshaw *et al.* (1976) showed that one (Table 1: 16), taken by John McDouall Stuart in 1845 during Charles Sturt's inland expedition, was collected prior to the holotype. Two (Table 1: 13, 15) were sent alive to London Zoo, one in 1867 from the Gawler Ranges and the other in 1873 from an unknown locality. The remaining 16 were regarded as being collected by Andrews, including the two in Paris (Table 1: 17–18), which formed part of a consignment of natural history material sent from SAMA to the Paris International Exhibition of 1878 (pers. data).

Apart from the holotype, two possible WA specimens were identified by Forshaw *et al.* (1976): one in the Natural History Museum, Tring (Table 1: 14) and another in the American Museum of Natural History, New York (Table 1: 19). Both were presented to the British

Museum in 1881 by F. D. Godman from the collection of John T. Cockerell (Sharpe 1906). While Cockerell is not known to have collected in WA, his son James F. Cockerell did so, for Samuel White in 1879, but with no report of a Night Parrot (Whittell 1954; SAMA archive). J. T. Cockerell's labels have been found to be inadequate or inaccurate (Sharpe 1906, Whittell 1954; pers. obs.) and, since he held two Gawler Ranges specimens, obtained from SAMA in September 1873, it is probable that these were the two acquired by Godman.

Two Tring specimens are of birds obtained alive by the Zoological Society of London. The first (Table 1: 15) was captured in the Gawler Ranges, sent to the Society by Dr Mueller in 1867 and was well studied in life (Sclater 1867, Murie 1868). The second 'addition to the menagerie' was obtained alive by the Society from a dealer on 16 March 1873 (Sclater 1873) but died a few days later according to its label (Table 1: 13). It was acquired by Lord Rothschild and passed to the museum as part of his bequest in 1937 (R. Prÿs-Jones *in litt.* 2012). Olsen (2009) believed that the latter was probably obtained by Andrews and, while I can find no evidence that he took or traded live birds Andrews (1883) did report that 'one of these parrots was caught in a hut' and was kept in 'a box with a handful of dry grass' in which it subsequently 'concealed itself'.

Of the three previously unknown specimens in European collections reported here, only one can now be traced. The missing Stuttgart specimen was acquired in 1883, with another bird specimen from the Gawler Ranges. The documentation associated with that in Strasbourg indicates that it too was from the Gawler Ranges. The Budapest specimen(s) are missing, but records there provide a year (1882) consistent with the period in which Andrews' specimens were arriving in Europe.

Adding the two Cockerell skins and three European specimens to Forshaw *et al.*'s (1976) total of 16 indicates that Andrews was very probably responsible for 21 of the 28 known Night Parrot specimens, and there may well have been more, such as the second London Zoo bird. Yet SAMA records list only 13 acquired by the museum and only four exchanged with other collections (Table 1: 6-7, 14, 19). Almost certainly the records are incomplete, but an additional explanation exists for which Forshaw *et al.* (1976) provided some evidence. Three of the specimens in the Australian Museum, Sydney, were sold to its Curator, E. P. Ramsay by SAMA Curator, F. G. Waterhouse, not as an exchange between museums. In his monthly reports to the museum's board Waterhouse made frequent reference to the lack of adequate finances for purchases, even once stating that he had used personal funds for the purpose. It seems likely that he also made direct sales to raise money, but such transactions do not appear in his monthly reports or in the museum's annual reports (pers. data). It is possible that the two specimens in the H. L. White collection, Museum Victoria, acquired from the Robert Grant collection, presumably in 1894 (Forshaw *et al.* 1976), were obtained similarly, and the Harvard and Budapest specimens were certainly purchased via dealers. Another possibility is that Andrews himself might have sold specimens to individuals or to dealers; he was self-employed and is known to have made private sales (Hale 1956). In his one publication concerning Night Parrots, Andrews (1883) stated that he had 'shot some specimens at Cooper's Creek in 1875' yet only one was acquired by SAMA. In view of this uncertainty, while the great majority of his specimens were from the Gawler Ranges, one or more that lack locality details could be from Cooper Creek.

#### Acknowledgements

I thank Robert Prÿs-Jones for suggesting and then assisting my enquiry of European museum collections, and all of the collection managers who responded, including those named herein who provided positive information. I am grateful to Wayne Longmore and an anonymous reviewer for constructive suggestions on the submitted draft.

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